



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES**



February 21, 2023

To: House Environment and Transportation Committee

From: Lisa Radov, President and Chair, Maryland Votes for Animals, Inc.

Re: Human Relations- Housing Discrimination – Service Dogs and Guide Dogs – HB 608 - Favorable

Chair Barve, Vice - Chair Stein, members of the Environment and Transportation Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Lisa Radov. As the President and Chair of Maryland Votes for Animals, Inc. I am here on behalf of Maryland Votes for Animals and The Humane Society of the United States to respectfully ask that the House Environment and Transportation Committee vote favorably for Human Relations- Housing Discrimination – Service Dogs and Guide Dogs – HB 608.

This bill would prohibit a person from discriminating in the sale or rental of, or otherwise making unavailable or denying, a dwelling to an individual with a disability who has, obtains, or retains a certain service dog or guide dog.

Service animals are different than animals who are adopted as pets. Pets are adopted for companionship. While they may be beloved members of the family, these animals are residing with the family to provide a vital service to a family member with disabilities.

The Americans with Disabilities Act defines Service Animals “...as dogs ... that are individually trained to do work or perform tasks for people with disabilities.” These animals undergo vigorous training to perform their duties and are very well-behaved canine citizens to graduate from their programs. While their owners often develop strong bonds with the animal, service animals are there to help. They perform vital tasks and lifesaving duties including guiding the blind, aiding the deaf, alerting and protecting a person from increased harm during a seizure, reminding a person to take medication, and more. Just as a caregiver would be permitted to live in an apartment or dwelling with a disabled person to assist with the necessary tasks for daily living, the same consideration should be given for service and guide dogs. Moreover, these dogs are legally entitled to accompany their owners under the Americans with Disabilities Act into service establishments. Using that standard, if a service or guide dog can go into a shop or restaurant, they should also be permitted to reside with a disabled person.

This bill will ensure that disabled people and their dedicated working service or guide dogs, including beloved service or guide dogs have given a lifetime of service and are retired, are protected under the law when it comes to renting or purchasing a home.

Thanks to Delegate Lehman for sponsoring HB 608. I urge the committee to give this bill a favorable report.

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